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SUBJECT: TURKEY: GROWING PESSIMISM AMONG KURDS IN SOUTHEAST
ABOUT "THE OPENING"

REF: A. ANKARA 1339

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1295

[1](#)C. ADANA 55

Classified By: Adana Principal Officer Daria Darnell for reasons 1.4(b,
d)

This is a Consulate Adana cable.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During a recent eight-day tour around southeast Turkey, we found Kurds throughout the region expressing growing doubt that the Government of Turkey is sincere about its "Democratic Opening." Many view it as the AK Party's (AKP) tactic to attract Kurdish voters after losing Kurdish support in the March 2009 local elections. The Kurds we met focused on four issues for the GOT to address -- a cessation of the Turkish military operations, constitutional amendments, amnesty for the PKK and broader use of Kurdish language -- and emphatically expressed their wish for a U.S. role in the process. End summary.

AKP Trying to Attract Voters for Early Elections?

[1](#)2. (C) Adana Principal Officer, Adana LES Political Assistant and Ankara Political Counselor visited Diyarbakir, Van, Agri, Dogubayazit, Yuksekova, Hakkari, Mus, Bingol, Tunceli, Bitlis, Elazig and Malatya in an eight-day blitz that began September 24. We found a broad range of Kurdish politicians, businessmen and lawyers openly pessimistic about whether the GOT's "Democratic Opening" will result in changes to the lives of Kurds in southeast Turkey. They fear the government will, in the words of a former CHP member of Parliament from Hakkari, "keep on talking and debating the issue, but they will never do anything about it." Most noted the CHP and MHP's strong opposition to the Opening and said PM Erdogan may be backing away from his previous support for a Kurdish initiative, citing Erdogan's use of the term "Democratic Opening" instead of "Kurdish Initiative" as proof of the lack of political will. Several local officials also cited contradictory statements and actions from the Turkish government and the Turkish state (i.e., its civil, judicial and security institutions). While the GOT discusses the expansion of Kurdish-language broadcasting, for example, legal cases continue against the mayor of Diyarbakir and other politicians for speaking Kurdish. Despite their

concerns, Kurds continue to hope for greater democratic rights and to support PM Erdogan. As the president of the Van Young Businessmen's Association told us, "as long as Erdogan is behind a solution, we are behind Erdogan."

¶3. (C) Several of our contacts, including the mayor of Diyarbakir, the deputy mayor of Hakkari and the mayor of Elazig, told us they expect the GOT to declare early elections in 2010, using the continual promise of the Democratic Opening and Kurdish language and education rights to attract Kurdish voters from the DTP to the AKP. The Elazig mayor (who is a member of AKP) said he expected the AKP convention on October 3 to include discussion of plans for early elections. Kurdish contacts told us they support the GOT's Democratic Opening but doubted it would cause significant defection from DTP to AKP. As the former president of the Mus Bar Association explained, "The Kurdish people are politicized from childhood, and we will not be deceived by government promises."

Kurds' Four Main Concerns

¶4. (C) In contrast to our trip in southeast Turkey in August (REF B), when our question "What do you want from the Kurdish initiative?" was answered with a laundry list of demands big and small, our Kurdish interlocutors on this trip focused on four priorities:

¶A. Turkish Armed Forces (TAF)'s operations in southeast Turkey must end. Our interlocutors generally cited this as the most important step for the GOT to take.

ANKARA 00001468 002 OF 003

¶B. Changes to the Turkish Constitution are essential. The Constitution, they argued, must protect the rights of ethnic minorities and religions in Turkey. There was no general agreement among Kurds we met with, however, regarding whether the rights of Kurds must be granted specifically in the Constitution, or whether a general statement guaranteeing the rights of all minorities would be better. Lawyers we met generally favored a broad statement of equal rights, while politicians favored specific language relating to Kurds.

¶C. The use of Kurdish language must be permitted in a wider range of activities, to include Kurdish-language education in primary schools. The GOT's permission for a "Living Languages Institute" at Mardin Artuklu University was praised (Note: Istanbul University will also have a Kurdology Institute), but the former president of Tunceli's Bar Association pointed out Dicle University's request to establish a Kurdish language department was denied, and the university in Tunceli was advised informally not to make a request at this time. Bar associations in Hakkari, Mus, Diyarbakir and Tunceli also reported to us that the Ministry of Justice's recent decree allowing prisoners to speak Kurdish with family members -- a policy they told us has been implemented smoothly -- as an example of a positive GOT step expanding language rights.

¶D. PKK members must receive amnesty. As with the constitutional changes, Kurds we spoke with had a wide range of opinions about the extent of the amnesty, from the insistence of the acting mayor of Dogubeyazit that PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan receive amnesty to the measured comments of Hakkari's deputy mayor, who told us amnesty for Ocalan and many of the PKK leadership would be politically impossible and recommended instead more comfortable prison conditions for Ocalan. Most alarming were the almost identical comments from city council members in Yuksekova and Dogubeyazit, who said that PKK members should not have to ask the GOT for forgiveness -- that instead the GOT should ask for forgiveness from the Kurds.

The View from the State

15. (C) Turkish government officials such as governors and sub-governors were generally supportive of Kurdish demands for greater language and education rights and hoped peace and stability would bring economic development. They were equally committed to the GOT's fight against the PKK and said the PKK must lay down its arms before any cessation of TAF military operations (with one notable exception: the governor of Hakkari, Muammer Turker, told us the TAF could perhaps limit their operations). Turker also described PKK pressure on voters in the March 2009 local elections and attributed some of the DTP's gains to that pressure, citing the inability of other parties' candidates even to campaign in the province. The sub-governor of Dogubayazit told us in his opinion "The DTP and PKK are the same." (Note: Adana Security Assistant, who was on the trip to make contacts in the Turkish National Police, reported deep unease in the TNP with the Democratic Opening and complete opposition to any type of amnesty for the PKK. End Note)

Where Is the U.S.?

16. (C) Virtually every Kurdish interlocutor (quite a few of whom have spent time in prison) urged a greater U.S. role in the Democratic Opening, asking for U.S. support for greater rights for Kurds and other minorities and for pressure on the GOT on human rights issues. Several leaders expressed extraordinary confidence in U.S. authority in Turkey, telling us variations of "we know that PM Erdogan went to the U.S. in September to get President Obama's support for the opening. The PM will come back to Turkey with a plan." The president of the Van Chamber of Commerce and Industry assured us "If President Obama would call the MHP and CHP and tell them to stop opposing the initiative, the Kurdish problem would be

ANKARA 00001468 003 OF 003

resolved in a few months."

Harsh Conditions in the Southeast

17. (C) Poverty is a striking feature of life in southeast Turkey, with subsistence farming, animal husbandry, little industry and unofficial estimates of unemployment in one town of 60 percent. (Comment: Governors and sub-governors universally declined to give us unemployment figures, but politicians were more forthcoming. End comment). Poverty and terror, including the GOT's forced evacuation of villages in the mid-1990s, has caused migration from southeastern villages to western Turkey and onward to western Europe. The sub-governor of Yuksekova in Hakkari bemoaned his town's image as a scene of PKK terror and pro-PKK protests, claiming to us that he could walk freely around town "even at night" and blaming the bad image for the lack of investment. (Note: Five PKK terrorists died during military operations in mid-September in Hakkari, and the GOT's refusal to turn the bodies over to the families for burial led to three days of protests in Yuksekova. End Note)

18. (C) We did see some positive signs on our journey. Road and other infrastructure projects are underway. The governor of Mus described the opening of several factories including a shoe factory that relocated from Istanbul in search of lower costs. Elazig and Malatya are vibrant university cities with expanding campuses and, in the case of Malatya, significant investment in the healthcare sector. Even in Hakkari, the extremely unsettled and poor province bordering Iraq and Iran, Adana's LES Political Assistant noted how the town has improved on this trip compared to other visits in his 28-year consulate career. More shops have opened; the streets were crowded with people, even on a Sunday night; homes were not just shelters for people, but "they have some architecture, like people are taking pride in their town and planning to stay."

Comment

19. (C) The sense of impatience and pessimism on this trip contrasted sharply with the mood of cautious optimism we experienced in August (REF B). Kurds continue to support the GOT and the Democratic Opening because they see it as the best possible option for greater democratic rights and they have no desire to separate from Turkey, but they are impatiently waiting for the GOT's concrete proposals. Meanwhile, deep distrust of the Kurds as shown by the TNP and the Dogubeyazit sub-governor make it clear that any GOT's overtures on the Kurdish issue will continue to attract strong nationalistic opposition.

JEFFREY

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